SUBMISSION TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PROVINCE OF NEW BRUNSWICK

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES IN NEW BRUNSWICK

SUBMITTED BY THE

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Table of Contents

Page #

A. Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons - Who We Are 2

B. Introduction 3

C. Discussion of Some Issues About Inclusive Education 8

D. Next Steps 21

E. Conclusion 23

F. List of Recommendations 25

G. Appendices

I Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms – Equality Rights ... 28
II Human Rights Act of New Brunswick 29
III Education Act of New Brunswick 30
IV Guidelines and Standards - Department of Education 32
V Quality Learning Agenda - Premier Bernard Lord 33
VI Quote from a Teacher 34

Section A : Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons – Who We Are

Who are we?

The Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons is a body for consultation and study, which was created to advise the provincial government on matters relating to the status of persons with disabilities. The Council reports directly to the Premier of the Province.

Responsibilities

The Act governing the Premier's Council states that the Council shall advise the Minister on matters relating to the status of persons with disabilities; shall bring before the government and the public matters of interest and concern to persons with disabilities; shall promote prevention of disabling conditions; shall promote employment opportunities of persons with disabilities; and shall promote access by persons with disabilities to all services offered to the citizens of New Brunswick.

Structure

The Council consists of a Chairperson and twelve other members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. Provisions in the Act guarantee representation by regions, agencies working on behalf of persons with disabilities and the public at large.

Activities

To carry out its functions, the Council will receive briefs and suggestions from individuals and groups concerning the status of persons of any age with disabilities of any type; undertake research on matters relating to persons with disabilities; recommend programs concerning the status of persons with disabilities; make referrals to and consult and collaborate with universities and individuals on matters which affect persons with disabilities; propose legislation, studies and recommendations as the Council considers necessary; appoint special committees when needed; maintain an information library on subjects related to persons with disabilities and on any services/programs likely to be of interest to persons with disabilities; and offer advice and/or intervention in cases where persons with disabilities are having difficulties in gaining access to needed services.

Section B: Introduction:

We are pleased to take this opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Education's current review of programming and services connected to the delivery of inclusive education in the province of New Brunswick.

We are an advisory body charged with the responsibilities of providing advice to the Government of New Brunswick and to inform the general public on matters of interest to citizens with disabilities of any type and of any age. As such, the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons is obviously very interested in any potential adjustments to the current practices around inclusive education in the public school system. This province has been a leader for more than two decades in demonstrating their commitment and their example of providing an inclusive school system for all students. We want that to continue.

While we support the need for ongoing evaluation and proper accountability for all public programs, we would like to point out that many of the community stakeholders representing persons with disabilities are apprehensive about the timing and the scope of this particular review. These groups, and the consumers and families they represent, must constantly struggle to break down the many barriers they face in their efforts to enjoy the same consistent full access to community programs and facilities that other citizens may take for granted. We would like to go on the record that the Department of Education and the Government of New Brunswick must be careful to proceed with the results of this review in such a way that inclusive education is not only preserved but hopefully enhanced for the benefit of all students. Any suggested changes must be carefully thought out prior to taking action in order to determine the practical effects that might negatively impact on the opportunities for all students to obtain a quality inclusive education in the regular school system.

Unfortunately the timing of this review is taking place while contract negotiations are under way with the teachers. This has led to a great deal of negative publicity in the media about the school environment and some distortion of the facts around the current composition of most

classrooms in the public school system. We do support the vital role of teachers.

We wish to remind the public and perhaps some of the education administrators, principals, teachers, politicians and other stakeholders that the primary purpose of the school system is to ensure that all students will be supported in such a way that they can learn and be enabled to reach their full potential to participate in all aspects of their communities and personal lives as full citizens.

We believe in a culture of belonging and in creating a welcoming school environment for all students. All students are challenged to learn to their full potential. This would include those considered to be high achievers as well as those who struggle. We also believe that there are more reasons to attend public school and be part of the regular classroom beyond just completing the academic curriculum and addressing literacy and numercy levels etc. We believe that a student's ability to acquire appropriate social skills, to develop good communication skills, and to learn how to work and get along with their diverse peers are perhaps the things that will truly benefit these students when they leave public school. Whether they go on to pursue studies at the post-secondary level or move directly into employment of some kind in their community, they will have greater potential for success if they have had these inclusive experiences as a foundation to their learning.

We are told by many employers that they are ready and able to train prospective employees in the particular job requirements and technical skills that will be utilized in that particular work environment. What employers would like to see in high school graduates are well-rounded individuals who are comfortable being part of a diverse workplace team and who are also able to respond appropriately to the customers and all people who now make up our modern diverse marketplace and society.

We also understand the current school system has a number of pressures and is trying to fulfill a number of objectives. When we look at the current realities around inclusive education, we are reminded of

the statement that opens the first chapter of the Charles Dickens book - A Tale of Two Cities - *" It was the best of times and it was the worst of times".*

Despite some of the recent rhetoric and media coverage surrounding the teachers' collective agreement process, we are still excited about the many examples of best practices and the successful implementation of inclusive education in many classrooms across New Brunswick.

However at the same time we are also frustrated and disappointed about other individual schools and districts that have not yet applied the necessary leadership and positive attitude to successfully demonstrate their real commitment to the principle of inclusion for all students. Why is inclusive education working so well in some places and not in others even when these places have access to the same general resources? We are thus of the opinion that simply providing more financial resources on their own is not the solution that will ensure that our public school system is consistently meeting all of the objectives of the quality learning agenda as outlined by the Government of New Brunswick.

However we know and we see that inclusion does work already in those classrooms, schools and districts who have chosen to make it work regardless of the human and financial resources available. We also know and see that inclusion does not work well in those classrooms, schools and districts where the necessary leadership, attitude and accountability are lacking.

Hopefully this review will help draw attention to the positive experiences and best practices for successful inclusion of all students and will chart a new course of commitment to see this initiative actually consistently implemented across the province.

It is our intention in this submission to briefly outline some of our observations about what we think are the appropriate messages to be communicated about inclusive education. We will also make some recommendations on how the current system could be improved for the future without becoming financially unsustainable.

The topic of inclusive public schools is very complicated and will certainly have a significant negative impact on the future lives of children and youth with disabilities and all other students across the province if we allow the system to move backwards in any way towards a segregated system. We will not be able to comment on every aspect that is of interest to our Council but we will give some highlights.

We wish we had more time to personally consult with a larger number of stakeholders connected to the education system and to the disability community at large, but we feel that our observations are based on significant experience and current information from a number of sources. The Premier's Council created a special Sub-Committee on Inclusive Education to help focus our responses on this topic. We also would like to be clear that we reserve the right to provide supplementary input to this review process once we are able to have access to the consultant's report that will be prepared and submitted to government.

We must all recognize that there are many points of view about how the school system could better meet the needs of particular stakeholders and this is also true about the disability community. Some parents and students are very satisfied with the status quo while others believe that we still have a long way to go towards providing the optimum educational experience for all students including those gifted students with above average academic abilities. In this brief we have tried to use information that we feel is based on widespread support across the disability sector but we do not intend to deny any other interested party from submitting their own additional opinions even if they disagree with us.

Inclusion is not about finding a single solution but rather finding ways to ensure that all students receive the support they need to have a quality education alongside their peers.

We will want to know specifically what particular elements of the inclusive education system will be addressed in the background commentary and in any particular recommendations to be proposed in the upcoming report from the consultant. We will have to analyze that

material and perhaps provide additional responses from our Council after the content of the report is made public. We will want to find out which topics have actually been covered and what perspectives have been listened to and included in the report.

We look forward to a document that will be fair and balanced and that recommends a positive vision that will meet the needs of all present and future students by respecting and accommodating diversity in the regular school classroom as the basis for the delivery of the educational experience for all students in the public school system.

Section C : Discussion of Some Issues About Inclusive Education

a) Definition of Full Inclusion

Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all children learn and participate together. It is based on the firm belief, and on real experience, that all children have value and can best learn in regular classrooms among children their own age. Inclusion also means that our schools help develop positive relationships and mutual respect between all pupils.

b) Practices for Successful Inclusion

Inclusive education will be successful if these important practices are followed:

- **Accepting unconditionally all children into regular class and the life of the school.**
- **Providing as much support to pupils, teachers, and classrooms as necessary to ensure that all pupils can participate in neighborhood schools and regular classes.**
- **Looking at all children for what they can do rather than what they cannot do. Teachers and parents have high expectations of all pupils.**
- **Developing educational goals according to a pupil's individual abilities while understanding that pupils do not need to have the same educational goals to learn together in regular classes.**
- **Restructuring schools and classes in ways that focus on individual achievement and student learning (for example, by developing class timetables to allow for more individual attention for all students.)**
- **Having strong leadership for inclusion from school principals and other administrators.**
- **Having teachers knowledgeable about different ways of teaching so that pupils with varying abilities and strengths can learn together.**
- **Having principals, teachers, parents and others work together to determine the most effective ways of providing a quality education in an inclusive environment.**

- **Taking parents seriously - especially parents' dreams and goals for their child's future.**

c) Does inclusive education mean that all pupils should never leave the regular classrooms?

Inclusive education means that all children are educated in regular classrooms. It does not, however, mean that individual pupils cannot leave the classroom for specific reasons. For example, a pupil may require one-on-one assistance in a particular subject area. This may or may not happen during regular class time. When an education system is inclusive, serious thought is given as to how often a pupil may be outside of the regular classroom and the reasons that this may happen. This "pull out" is usually very time-limited. It does not mean that pupils with certain characteristics (for example, those who have disabilities) are grouped together in separate classrooms for all or part of a school day.

Within regular classrooms, opportunities are developed for all pupils to learn together even though some pupils may have different educational goals. An inclusive education system does not separate certain students within regular classrooms (for example, in the back corner of a classroom) but rather designs classrooms and classroom activities so that all pupils can learn together.

d) Benefits of inclusive education

Over the years, the benefits of providing an inclusive education to all children have been shown. Inclusive education is very important because:

- **All children are able to be part of their community and develop a sense of belonging and become better prepared for life in the community as children and adults.**
- **Inclusive education provides better opportunities for learning as children with varying abilities are often better motivated when they learn in classes in schools and are surrounded by other children. Children are exposed to a wide range of activities and people.**

- **In an inclusive education environment, the expectations on all children are higher. Successful inclusion attempts to develop an individual's strengths and gifts. Higher expectations usually lead to more success.**
- **Inclusive education allows children to work on individual goals while being with other students their own age.**
- **Inclusive education encourages the involvement of parents in the education of their children and in the activities of their local schools.**
- **Inclusive education fosters a culture of respect and belonging. It provides the opportunity to learn about and accept individual differences. Typically, issues such as harassment and bullying are not as serious when a culture of inclusion and belonging is created.**
- **Inclusion provides all children with opportunities to develop friendships with one another. Friendships provide role models and opportunities for growth. They are essential to a successful and fulfilling life in the community.**
- **Inclusive education usually has a positive effect on our communities. As children learn to accept one another it is less likely that certain individuals will be rejected by society as they have been in the past.**

e) <u>Working Definition of Exceptional Student</u>

The Premier's Council would prefer that it would not be necessary to have a specific definition for "an exceptional student". We believe that all students are exceptional in their own way. It is our fear that too much emphasis in the past has been placed on labeling students to focus on their differences instead of identifying teaching strategies and other supports that would better enable all students to reach their full potential. However we know that part of this review is going to look at possible definitions.

Therefore we would like to suggest the following option for an acceptable definition:
"<u>An exceptional student is a student whose opportunity to reach their full potential and to be included is deemed to require specific short or long-term interventions, accommodations and/or supports from teachers, other professionals or para-professionals or other appropriate resources.</u>" We would like to note that this potential definition would

also include gifted students.

There is an expectation of the use of professional judgement but we must ensure that teachers are not assuming the role of doctors in making a medical diagnosis and suggesting that medication is the solution for solving problems in the classroom. We would also like to ensure that everybody is separating the issue of classroom behaviours and discipline problems from the legitimate characteristics associated with different types of disabilities. We would like everyone to avoid following the old style of the over medicalization of disability which places too much focus on assessments and labeling. Such labels are not helpful to developing practical ways to support that student in reaching his/her potential.

f) <u>Legal Responsibilities</u>

We have provided you with selected references from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Human Rights Act of New Brunswick and the Education Act of New Brunswick, which we believe clearly create a legal responsibility to provide an inclusive education experience for all students in public schools. We expect that the consultant's report will include an examination of the case law in Canada on this topic so we will not cover that material in this submission. We would also like to point out that the current government has stated on a number of occasions that they remain committed to the implementation of inclusive education in New Brunswick. The government has also publicly recognized that inclusion is guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the provincial Education Act. This commitment is also expressed in their Quality Learning Agenda Policy Statement on K-12. (Please see Appendices in Section G.)

g) <u>Classroom Composition</u>

It has been difficult to explain our position on inclusion through the media to help offset the negative publicity happening around the teachers' collective agreement bargaining process. We have also been hesitant to speak publicly out of respect for the collective bargaining process itself. We have to figure out a strategy that ensures that this

debate includes a fair recognition that support services in the school system are lacking for a number of situations and students with a disability should not be singled out as the only source of frustration for classroom teachers. For example they have students who exhibit behavior/discipline problems; they have students from single-parent families; they have students who are dealing with emotional difficulties; they have students from multicultural backgrounds with issues to address; they have students coming from very poor socio-economic conditions; and a host of other diverse issues that may influence the classroom environment at the schools.

Council would support the recognition that there would be benefits to all teachers and students if additional teachers were added to the school system in order to reduce class sizes and provide more direct support to all students with any need. We feel that with declining enrollments in school districts, we are provided with a good window of opportunity. That is, to use the existing and possibly some new resources to improve the availability of actual direct supports for the classroom teachers and for all students instead of reducing the budget of the school system based on the reduced total number of students enrolled.

The Premier's Council would like to be very strong in promoting the concept that inclusion is here to stay and also to recognize that the school system must be able to respond to meet the diverse needs of all students in a way that allows them to learn effectively and to be happy in the school environment.

Students should also be given the necessary skills to enable them to be good citizens when they leave the public school system and to move on to either post-secondary training or directly into the workforce. This will be a win-win situation for everyone. However we would strenuously object to any changes that would enable teachers to refuse to serve specific students. Setting limits on the number of special needs students in the classroom will only encourage more labeling and perhaps wasting more resources on assessment procedures that do not add value to the learning environment. Such a process could also foster conflict amongst parents who may try to enforce arbitrary limits over which students should be included in a classroom based on their

perceptions about particular students.

h) Teacher and Staff Training

We believe that there is an underlying problem in the current training of new teachers and the professional development of teachers and other support staff working in the school system. We think the university training programs in the field of education should encompass an integrated multi-level curriculum that talks about inclusive education and respect for diversity of all kinds including those students who have a disability. We also think that there should be targeted courses, which include elements to explain the different types of disabilities, the options for connecting to community resources, and how to adapt and accommodate teaching programs to ensure that students with different types of disabilities are effectively included in the classroom. This may require changes to the current licensing requirements for teachers in the Province of New Brunswick to ensure that this type of basic training has been provided before they have graduated and been hired into the school system.

We are also concerned that a certain number of existing teachers do not take advantage of the available options for upgrading their professional skills on how to effectively teach students with different disabilities inclusively. It seems that the teachers who are already committed to inclusion take advantage of opportunities to upgrade their skills through summer institutes and other professional development while others who are less supportive are not required to do the same. Continuing education options should be supported and perhaps even made mandatory to some degree as they are in other professions.

We are also distressed by the reality that in a number of school districts at the start of the school year in the fall there are many paraprofessionals such as Teacher's Assistants and others who have not actually received advanced training and information about the students with disabilities with whom they will be working. The districts do not pay these paraprofessionals for the time to attend available training. This needs to be corrected. We also see situations partway through the same school year where paraprofessionals are laid off and new people

hired in order to qualify for various wage supplement programs. This means that paraprofessionals who now have experience and have built up a relationship with their students are dropped in favor of new personnel partway through the year. This certainly creates anxiety and confusion for the students and parents who must now deal with a new support person.

i) Future of APSEA (Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority)

The Premier's Council would like to support the continuation of the current mandate and services provided by APSEA for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and students who are blind or visually impaired. We recognize that particular communication issues created by these disabilities require special expertise to complement the resources available at schools and in the regular classrooms to ensure that the students are able to fully participate and communicate effectively. Along with the technical expertise and access to special equipment, tutoring and special counseling services, APSEA also has a good track record in assisting the students with transitional planning and follow up arrangements in anticipation of the time when they will graduate and leave the public school system.

j) Funding Formula

We believe that New Brunswick has a fairly good funding concept to build upon within a global budget formula that provides funds to the districts with significant consideration of the overall number of students enrolled in each district. This is a better option than getting too far into the categorical funding model, which is based on specific diagnosis of disabilities and specific needs of individual students. The danger in categorical funding is that it provides an incentive for schools and districts to label students with disabilities in order to increase the amount of funding from the Department of Education allotted to that particular district. We have already seen stories in the press that portray classrooms as having very high numbers of students who require supports of some kind.

However we noted in our discussions that a budget formula does have to be flexible enough to ensure that individual schools with individual students who need additional supports can have access to the resources required to achieve those supports. This could especially be an issue in smaller and/or rural schools with a smaller base number of students for the global budget formula to be based on. Once again we note that we do not wish to see a decline in the overall funding for the school system simply because the overall enrollment is going down. This would waste an opportunity to redistribute current and future resources where needed and when needed.

Perhaps a solution would be to increase the individual amount of funding assigned under the per capita formula funding model currently in place for all student services or freeze it at existing levels as enrollment declines. This could possibly be supplemented by reserve contingency funds held in each district and/or at the Department of Education to be able to respond to certain situations that may develop during the school year as problems are identified that require specific resources to resolve. We also noted that the Department of Education currently does give some designated funding to districts for specific programs without supposedly allowing flexibility in theory as to how those funds are to be used. It has been our experience that there have been situations where some targeted funding supplied to the districts may not actually be spent directly on meeting the needs of students requiring additional supports. This indicates to us that the issue of financial accountability with the districts and the Department of Education has to be more clearly defined and be implemented consistently across the province.

k) <u>Best Practices</u>

How do we promote best practices for inclusion in public schools and New Brunswick? The key to success seems to us that consistent leadership must come from the top from the Department of Education to the school districts and from the districts to the school principals. More importantly, principals who provide the front line leadership in each individual school must ensure that inclusion is a philosophy that is accepted, promoted and implemented on an ongoing basis as a

mandatory requirement of the workplace. The Department of Education must also do more to promote examples of best practices within the school system and externally to the public at large.

There are numerous examples of inclusion working successfully in many individual classrooms and in many schools. They could serve as role models to those locations not yet demonstrating a full understanding and implementation of inclusive education. Many schools have a focus on competitive sports but that should not be the only avenue for extracurricular activities that could allow more inclusion of students with disabilities. Dealing with the issue of transportation and access to other disability supports after the academic school day is over are real barriers to participation in extracurricular activities for many students with disabilities.

There should also be a leadership development program for school principals to focus around the topic of inclusion and inclusive practices and what resources and strategies can be implemented to respond to the different needs of the diverse classroom of today.

We need to make real the notion that public schools must be able to prepare students to be successful citizens when they leave the public school system to venture out to the community for either post-secondary education and directly into the workforce. The demographics of New Brunswick's population mean that we will have to include everyone in the future labor pool in order to meet the demands of our economic activities in the province, and therefore inclusion in the public school system is a smart investment.

The Department of Education has been revising their "Best Practices for Inclusion" booklet and are planning to call the new version "Preferred Practices for Inclusion." This is sending the wrong signal by watering down the title itself and implying that they would prefer that schools follow best practices but that it is not required.

After the current collective agreement dispute is resolved, we believe it will be necessary to create and implement an ongoing communication strategy to highlight the positive examples of successful inclusion. We

must ensure that the message is sent to all stakeholders that practicing respect for diversity and accommodating exceptional students is not an option but a requirement for all classrooms and schools to carry out. Perhaps this could be incorporated into the annual New Brunswick Disability Awareness Week campaign.

l) Parental Involvement and Dispute Resolution

We know that there is a process currently in place that is supposed to foster the cooperative resolution of any disputes as to how student services are being provided. Parents deal first with the classroom teacher; then with the school principal; followed then by the student services representative at the school district. Finally, if necessary, parents can go to the Students Services Division of the Department of Education. It seems that parents are welcome in the school setting as volunteers and fundraisers and to be informed about the progress of their children but they may not receive the same friendly response if they disagree with the way services are being provided to their child with exceptionalities.

Again it has been our experience that many schools and districts are working good faith and in a timely fashion to try and resolve any problems presented to them. However in many other situations we do not see the same spirit of cooperation, the same level of respect for the viewpoint of parents or the same outcomes to situations that had been resolved successfully in other locations around the province.

We therefore believe that the current appeal and/or dispute resolution process has to have some clarification as to the reasonable time period allowed to transpire for each stage of the process in order to be fair to all of the parties involved. We would also like to see more accountability and the involvement of the Students Services Division of the Department of Education in situations that have not been successfully resolved at the school or district level as some parents can wait literally months for decisions to be made and communicated to them under the current procedures.

m) Accountability and Outcome Measures

The Department of Education and the school districts have a number of comprehensive policies to govern the delivery of services in the school system. However in reality there is a significant lack of consistency and application of the principles, objectives, and procedures that would better ensure that all students with exceptionalities wherever they live and go to school across the province would have access to a similar level of services and a similar positive environment for learning and having a student's needs met in order to reach his/her full potential.

There seems to be little incentive and reward for those schools and professionals who work hard to do the right thing and to overcome any challenges presented by students in their care. There also seems to be little in the way of consequences for those schools and those professionals who have not moved forward in a meaningful manner to fully implement an inclusive education environment at all levels within their schools. For example, if a principal is not demonstrating a full commitment to inclusive education by providing the necessary leadership and implementation of its current legal and policy obligations around inclusion, then that person should be relieved from that position of authority and leadership and replaced by someone more suited to the responsibilities and requirements for that position.

We would also suggest that measuring the success of the school experience for all students will have to include more than just academic test scores. Students should be surveyed along with their parents to see if they are satisfied with their experiences. For example we should be asking questions such as:

- **How many have been supported regarding their participation in extracurricular activities and are they having a positive relationship with their fellow students and teachers?**
- **Have the support services and technical aids identified in their individual service plans actually been provided and implemented in a timely and comprehensive manner starting from the beginning of the school year in question?**

- **Have parents been made to feel welcome when they have attended school functions and/or communicated to school officials' matters about their children and their particular needs?**
- **Are students ready and comfortable for the transition from high school to the next phase of their education or employment experiences?**
- **Are the guidance counselors adequately prepared to meet the particular planning issues of exceptional students?**
- **Does the school have a positive reputation for promoting and supporting diversity within all activities happening at that particular school?**
- **How does the Department of Education ensure that inclusion is actually being fully implemented in individual schools and districts across the province?**
- **Are they identifying the current champions and leaders who are already working effectively in the school system to implement inclusive education?**
- **Are we taking advantage of options such as peer helper programs, successful role models from other schools and other community resources to broaden the likelihood of successful inclusive experiences?**

n) <u>Language and Culture</u>

We would like to observe that although we have one Education Act in the province, there have been significant differences in the philosophy in delivery of services for exceptional students between the Francophone and the English school districts. This is more than just a language difference. Some of these differences are based on different teaching approaches such as those used with Deaf students. Other factors include the impact of French immersion programs for the Anglophone school districts where many students who do not require support services will be more likely to participate in the immersion program leaving a higher proportion of students with exceptionalities in the regular programs.

It is interesting to point out that along with English and French as languages of communication in New Brunswick, there are number of

people who rely on sign language interpretation and others who use Braille as their primary language of communication. We want to ensure that these alternative languages are preserved and made available to those students who need to use them.

Section D : Next Steps

This submission is being prepared while the public consultations and background research for this review is still underway. As stated previously, the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons will be very much interested in examining the final report from the consultant. Due to the time constraints given to the consultant, we have significant concerns that not all of the interested parties will have had adequate opportunity to present their particular views on the topic of inclusion.

We are especially worried that a number of parents of exceptional students and some other community organizations involved in advocacy and provision of services for persons with disabilities will not have had the chance to participate in any face-to-face discussions about this review with other stakeholders and may not have the time and the resources necessary to provide a written submission that could reach the consultant before the final report has to be completed and submitted to government. We expect that a number of these stakeholders will be waiting to see what is in that report before they decide it is necessary to react.

Inclusive education is a complicated topic and we believe it will require more reflection and consultation before any significant changes should be made. Sometimes we complain that government moves too slowly but in this case we are concerned that things may be happening too quickly especially in the context of the teachers negotiations on their collective agreement.

We would like to see ongoing meaningful and effective consultations with the disability community representatives through such venues as the promised reconstituted and reformed Dialogue on Education Committee previously established by the Department of Education and provincial disability organizations to ensure the exchange of information around supporting exceptional students in the school system.

We also need to provide mechanisms that will allow parents of exceptional students to have a voice in the development and implementation of policies and services that affect their children at school. This may require some targeted representation on the District Education Councils and the opportunity to provide input directly to the Department of Education and to the different disability organizations that represent them.

Section E : Conclusion

We have appreciated the opportunity to share some observations about the future direction for inclusive education in the public schools of New Brunswick. At the end of this document we are also providing a summary list of specific recommendations for consideration by this review process. We may wish to add further input and other recommendations once we have read the review report from the consultant.

The Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons has had a long involvement with the public school system ever since the Council was first created in 1982. We have not tried to write an operational policy manual in this submission however we have attempted to highlight some of the important principles around the subject of inclusive education. We would like the debate on this topic to be based on the facts and not on misinformation or the vested self-interest of any segment involved in the delivery of services in the school system.

All of the stakeholders need to understand that the public schools have an obligation to serve all students who are part of our diverse communities and that we should be moving forward on all fronts to implement this vision of inclusion for all students.

We are prepared to provide further information or to respond to any questions raised by the content of this brief or about the specific recommendations that follow in the next section of this submission. We also want to draw attention to the fact that we have access to many sources of information about what is working and what is not working in the school system. The good news is that many exceptional students are being very well served under the current system and we would hope that the rest of that system would soon be required to do the same.

Despite the limitations and format being used for public consultations, we would like to acknowledge the efforts being undertaken by the consultant to seek input from many different sources. We are hopeful that the final report will reflect a fair cross-section of that input. We truly believe that effective leadership and a positive attitude can

overcome most of the barriers that have prevented inclusive education from being successfully and fully implemented across the province in the manner that is possible and that already exists to us in N.B..

Section F : List of Recommendations

We recommend that:

1. **The Premier and the Minister of Education make clear public statements to reconfirm the commitment of this government to insure that inclusive education is here to stay in New Brunswick.**

2. **The Department of Education take action immediately to change the licensing requirements for teachers in New Brunswick to ensure teachers are well prepared to teach effectively in an inclusive education system and meet the diverse needs of all students.**

3. **The Department of Education work in cooperation with the Faculty of Education at all New Brunswick universities to highlight the expectation that inclusive education will be integrated across the curriculum for teachers as well as expecting mandatory specific training on understanding how to meet the needs of students with various disabilities.**

4. **The current mandate and resources administered through the APSEA initiative be continued for the foreseeable future.**

5. **The job description for the position of school principal include accountability measures that require the principal to provide effective leadership within the school at all times to support inclusive education measures.**

6. **The current funding formula be adjusted so that as student enrollment continues to decline, financial resources and especially the numbers of teachers and support staff will not be reduced. This would provide for reduced class sizes and improved student services and teacher supports for the benefit of all students with exceptionalities.**

7. **The school budget process be changed so that some funds are held in reserve by the Department of Education in order to provide supplemental funding to provide supplemental support in specific situations as they are identified at the school level. There may need to be special consideration to ensure adequate funding for smaller schools especially in the rural areas to enable consistency and a level playing field in the availability of student supports.**

8. **The current dispute resolution and/or appeal mechanism needs to be refined to insure that disputes are dealt with in a timely fashion.**

9. **The Department of Education review all policies, incentives and possible mandatory requirements to ensure that all teachers and other paraprofessionals take advantage of opportunities for professional development around the successful implementation of inclusive education.**

10. **The Department of Education act as promised to revise the terms as promised to create a more mutually beneficial interactive process for the operation of the Dialogue on Education Committee. This Committee involves a number of disability organizations and officials from the Department of Education.**

11. **The Department of Education develop a quality assurance program to objectively measure student and parent satisfaction with the implementation of inclusive education practices.**

12. **Students with disabilities have reasonable access to all extracurricular activities offered by the schools to other students. This would include providing access to appropriate transportation and any other disability supports required while at the school (i.e. sign language interpreter services or attendant care).**

13. **Individual schools be required to demonstrate that they are providing consistent and adequate transitional planning services**

for all students to insure that they are prepared for what they will be doing when they graduate from the public school system.

14. **The Department of Education must create a new Best Practices for Inclusive Education resource manual to highlight examples of successful inclusive education initiatives and to clearly state that it is mandatory for all schools to implement an inclusive education environment throughout their school in all activities. The resource manual could include an appendix with specific contact information of teachers and schools and other community resources willing to provide hands-on information and support to schools attempting to improve their level of inclusive education for all students.**

15. **The Department of Education adopt the proposed definitions for full inclusion and for exceptional students as outlined in this submission.**

Section G : Appendices

Appendix I

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms:

Equality Rights

15(1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

(2) subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program, or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those at a disadvantage because of race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Appendix II

Human Rights Act of New Brunswick – Chapter H - 11

5(1) No person, directly or indirectly, alone or with another, by himself or by the interposition of another, shall

(a) deny to any person or class of persons any accommodation, services or facilities available to the public, or

(b) discriminate against any person or class of persons with respect to any accommodation, services or facilities available to the public,

because of race, colour, religion, national origin, ancestry, place of origin, age, physical disability, mental disability, sexual orientation, sex, social condition, political belief or activity.

Appendix III

Education Act of New Brunswick – Chapter E - 12

8(1) Subject to subsection (2), the Minister shall provide free school privileges under this Act for every person who is of school age and who

a) has not graduated from high school, and

b) is a resident of the Province

8(2) subsection (1) does not relieve the government of Canada of any obligation in respect of the education of any person whose education is the constitutional responsibility of the Government of Canada.

Duties of pupils

14(1) It is the duty of a pupil to

a) participate in learning opportunities to his or her potential,

b) accept increasing responsibility for his or her learning as he or she progresses through his or her schooling,

c) attend to assigned homework,

d) attend school regularly and punctually,

e) contribute to a safe and positive learning environment,

f) be responsible for his or her conduct at school and while on the way to and from school,

g) respect the rights of others, and

h) comply with all school policies.

14(2) It is the right of a pupil to be informed of his or her educational progress on a regular basis.

Compulsory attendance

15(1) Except as provided in section 16 and subject to subsection (2), a child is required to attend school in the school in which the child is placed by the superintendent concerned under section 11

a) beginning on the first school day of a given school year, if on or before the 31st day of December of that school year the child will have attained the age of five years, and

b) until the child graduates from high school or attains the age of 18 years.

Appendix IV

Principles (Guidelines & Standards Document Page 3)
Department of Education – Province of New Brunswick

1. **Good classroom instruction is of paramount importance.**

2. **Educators are expected to remain current in effective teaching practices in learning theory such as multi-level and/or differentiated instruction, learning styles theory and practice, and multiple intelligence theory and practice.**

3. **Classroom teachers are expected to provide additional assistance to students who experience difficulties.**

4. **Collaborative consultation and problem-solving approaches are seen as the most effective processes for resolving instructional-delivery problems and/or student learning difficulties.**

5. **Classroom teachers are educators who have primary responsibility for all students including those with exceptionalities.**

Appendix V

Quality Learning Agenda Objectives – Government of New Brunswick:

- **Ensure students achieve at the highest standards of excellence**
- **Develop the whole child**
- **Promote strong, successful schools within the involved communities**
- **Support successful strains issues to further learning and training**
- **Ensure accountability throughout the education system**

" We are taking steps to refocus our education system on the individual students where it belongs," Premier Lord said. "We believe that children are owed the best possible start to learning. Each learner must be given the opportunity to achieve and excel to the best of his or her abilities at all times. None should be held back from learning."

Premier Bernard Lord on the public release of the government's Quality Learning Agenda – April 23, 2003

Appendix VI

Inclusion in Education

**"Our job is to teach the kids we have. Not the ones we would like to have. Not the ones we used to have. Those we have right now.
... all of them."**

-Quote from a Teacher

**(Taken from the Inclusive Education Fact Sheet
NB Association for Community Living
October 2002)**